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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1431
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4937
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8515
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6082
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1760
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3958
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1921
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000643

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: A GENERAL WILLING TO MEET

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Classified By: CDA Shari Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Charge paid a farewell call August 5 on Lt. Gen Myint Swe, the only Burmese general who has been willing to meet with her regularly. The meeting was friendly and relaxed, even though our political differences are clear. While insisting Burma was on its own path towards democracy, he indicated interest in continued dialogue with the Charge's successor. He repeatedly urged Charge to explain Burma to Washington policymakers, yet did not indicate that Burmese policymakers have any interest in US views. Myint Swe expressed appreciation for US assistance after Cyclone Nargis, but reveal continuing regime paranoia about international intentions. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Charge expressed appreciation for the opportunity to regularly exchange views with Myint Swe, even though we had some wide differences of opinion. She recommended that he continue to meet with her successor. He welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Charge's successor and agreed that continued discussions could improve understanding.

Increase Washington Understanding

¶3. (C) Myint Swe urged the Charge to describe to Washington policymakers what was really going on in Burma. He repeated several times that he understood that the White House and other agencies, in addition to the State Department, had input into U.S. foreign policy. In particular, she should explain that Burma is moving towards democracy, but that it will not be like the U.S. Burmese leaders have to "train" the people so they understand democracy. While the U.S. may perceive Burma as moving too slow, nonetheless the country is on the path and will keep moving towards democracy.

¶4. (C) The Charge replied that the US understood that democracy has to be appropriate for different circumstances, however, the people must have a voice in shaping that democracy. USG comments are always meant to be helpful in regards to how Burma can become more democratic by increasing popular participation. Two-way communications between the people and their leaders would enable the people to offer

input on what they want to see. In that discussion, lies a way forward. The USG has not seen much evidence of discussion with people who have different ideas. For instance, she said that Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi had indicated that they could have accepted 90 percent of the constitution. Had there been discussions with them some mutually acceptable revisions might have been found. Popular buy-in will best ensure long-term stability, she stated.

No Discussions, Just Send a Letter

15. (C) Myint Swe said that Min Ko Naing had been told that if he wanted to offer suggestions, he should put them in writing to be forwarded to the authorities. Instead they chose the wrong path - "a path of incitement." Because of this, actions had to be taken, otherwise the authorities feared a negative impact on the country. They broke the law. This was not a political act, but a criminal one. He claimed they would receive due process, and if they do not break the law again, then actions will not be taken against them. People peacefully expressing different points of view should not be against the law, asserted the Charge. Myint Swe cited the violation of the law restricting meetings of more than five persons, and claimed that they had tried to incite demonstrations by students and monks. "This we cannot accept." Charge reiterated that sitting down and talking with the 88 Generation Student leaders would have been much more productive rather than arresting them.

Prospects for Increased International Cooperation

16. (C) Acknowledging that we would continue to have

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different opinions about how to handle dissent, Charge then inquired whether the international assistance that had come in after Cyclone Nargis had caused the leaders' opinions of the international community to improve. Myint Swe expressed appreciation for the assistance, saying it helped the affected areas recovery. He added that the leaders recognized the good will shown by the US. However, because of Burmese policy, he continued, "we could not accept these ships and planes on our soil." While, Nargis had created possibilities for cooperation, Myint Swe then claimed that the US had cut off counter-narcotics cooperation, "a fight in which we used to cooperate. I think we would welcome this cooperation." Charge said that actually we were still willing to cooperate on counter-narcotics, but the Home Affairs Minister had blocked visas for our staff.

17. (C) The international community was interested in cooperating in other areas, such as health and education, according to the Charge, but continued to face obstacles like the inability to get visas. She said the international community wanted to help and should not be regarded as the enemy. A positive outcome of Nargis would be the removal of these obstacles so more assistance could flow. Myint Swe then revealed the paranoia always just under the surface. He said that not all of the people trying to get in have good intentions—"there were destructive elements also." In addition, NGOs might stray into "enemy territory." He also said some restrictions might have been created by local level leaders for their own reasons that the senior leadership did not know about. The Charge asked again if there was any realization that assistance could be beneficial, and Myint Swe acknowledged having good experiences as well.

18. (C) Charge expressed hope that our good intentions would be recognized by the senior leaders, which could enable us to begin discussing more difficult issues in an effort to find some common ground. Myint Swe urged Charge again to tell the different institutions of your foreign policy establishment about the progress you have seen here. "If their reaction is positive, then we will cooperate." The Charge said she could

not promise any big changes in policy, but she would speak about the good things she has seen, like the resiliency of the people and their strength. After briefly chatting about the US election, Myint Swe then expressed regret that the U.S. had imposed more sanctions on Burma with the JADE Act. He described distrust as a two-way street. Charge replied that the sanctions would go away when there were positive political developments. For that reason, she urged that more effort be made to discuss the harder issues between us. Myint Swe promised to cooperate with Charge's successor and said he had always provided security for US facilities. "Our politics might be different, but we are friends," he concluded.

¶9. (C) Comment: Myint Swe does not usually meet with diplomats, but receives special dispensation to meet with Charge since he must have senior approval. Each time we meet he appears more comfortable debating back and forth, even though this culture regards arguing as rude. While it would be nice to think that charm won him over, it is more likely that a senior leader wants some idea about what we are up to. Since our conversation was recorded, a Burmese notetaker sat immediately behind Charge, and two Burmese military officers took notes, it does appear that the memcon will have wider readership in the regime. The senior leaders prefer to get their information in writing rather than in face-to-face dialogue. However, these written reports do not necessarily make it up to the top; they stop with an official reluctant to deliver bad news up. While it would also be nice to think that that our Nargis assistance had positively changed minds, it appears more likely that fear of a US invasion prompted the opening, which portends much less change in the future. The fear of invasion was real according to a variety of our contacts in the regime. Than Shwe and Maung Aye are only focused on self-preservation.

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